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ABSTRACT

Project LIFTS (Learning Improvement through Teaching Strategies) was designed to serve adult basic education (ABE) students enrolled at Johnson County Community College (Kansas) who are diagnosed as having a specific learning disability. These students enrolled in Basic English, a pre-General Educational Development Test preparation class, and were taught particular learning strategies designed to increase grammar and writing skills. Basic components of the Sentence Strategy used in the class were to test the student's current ability; describe what the student should do; model (demonstrate) the strategy; provide verbal rehearsal, skill practice, and feedback; and test to measure growth. Modifications to make this strategy appropriate for adults included developing materials to teach entry-level skills and making the adaptations to the existing strategy: development of grammar lessons, focus on mutual discussion in verbal rehearsal, omission of compound-complex sentences, and postponement of paragraph writing. The second phase of Project LIFTS provided other ABE instructors with an inservice program through development of a videotape. Project LIFTS students indicated satisfaction with progress and confidence in their writing skills. Instructors were equally positive. (YLB)

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PROJECT LIFTS--A SUMMARY

December 1984

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Project LIFTS (Learning Improvement through Teaching Strategies) was designed to serve the ABE students enrolled at Johnson County Community College annually who are diagnosed as having a specific learning disability. These students were taught particular learning strategies that were designed to increase grammar and writing skills. These students enrolled in Basic English, a pre-GED preparation class. The purpose of the class and the learning strategies was to provide cognitive training that would assist these individuals to pass the GED and acquire marketable skills.

Learning strategies are specific techniques, principles or rules that facilitate the acquisition, manipulation, integration, storage and retrieval of information (Alley and Deshler, 1979). The purpose is to teach students how to learn. The Sentence Strategy is one of several learning strategies designed by the University of Kansas Learning Disabilities Institute. It was intended to be used with learning disabled (LD) adolescents in a learning center setting. Project LIFTS instructors modified the Sentence Strategy somewhat to make it more appropriate for adult learners. However, the basic components of the strategy remain the same.

1. *Test* to determine student's current ability. On the first night of class, students are asked to write a paragraph. Several topics are suggested: however, the students may choose a topic of their own as well. The writing samples receive two scores--one for sentence structure and one for paragraph form. To be correct, a sentence must contain correct capitalization, punctuation and word usage. The paragraph score is determined by dividing the number of correct sentences by the number of sentences attempted. Correct paragraphs have the following criteria: proper indentation, at least four sentences, the configuration of a paragraph and clear meaning.
2. *Describe* what the student should do. Make reference to *cue cards*. The teacher describes the sentence type to students individually or in small groups. Cue cards are provided in the sentence notebook. This presents the explanation visually and auditorily.
3. *Model* or demonstrate the strategy. The teacher presents several examples of the sentence type. Students complete an introductory worksheet on the specific type of sentence. For this exercise, students may refer to the cue cards and receive help from the instructor.
4. *Verbal Rehearsal* indicates how well the students understand concepts of the strategy. The instructor explains all errors that the student made on the worksheet. The student verbally corrects all errors. Discussion continues until the instructor feels that the student understands the concept. The students must receive a score of 90% before continuing. If necessary, the student would redo the worksheet at this point.
5. *Skill Practice* provides opportunities to master each level of difficulty. Exercises are provided for each sentence type. They fall into three levels of difficulty: 1) identify, 2) supply, 3) generate. At each level, four separate exercises are available to provide ample practice. When a student reaches 90% mastery on Level 1, he/she moves to Level 2, and so on. A unique characteristic of this program is that students don't move ahead until they have mastered each component. After each sentence type is mastered, students complete a cumulative review including all sentence types studied to that point.
6. *Feedback* from the instructor informs the student of his/her progress. As soon as the student completes an exercise, the instructor checks it and explains all errors. The next exercise is assigned. If the student scored 90%, the next level is assigned. If the score is below 90%, another exercise at the same level is assigned. Skill practice and feedback are continued until all levels of exercises are mastered.
7. *Test* to measure growth. On the last night of class, or upon completion of all four sentence types, students are again asked to write a paragraph or

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more on suggested topics or a topic of their choice. Growth is measured by comparing pre- and post-writing samples.

The Basic English class is a pre-GED class designed to help adults improve their skills in grammar and composition. One instructor has experience in teaching Basic English. A second was added who is certified to teach LD students and who has experience teaching the Sentence Strategy. A tctal of 18 students completed the class period from February 1983 to November 1983. Total enrollment numbered 40; many students were unable to complete the program for reasons unrelated to the content of the class. Two of these students who completed the program were identified as LD through previous testing or through the Johnson County Community College ACCESS testing program (which includes administering of various diagnostic assessments: WAIS, WRAT, Woodcock-Johnson). In addition, eight students were foreign-born and were acquiring English as a second language (ESL) skills. All students enrolled in Basic English were exposed to the Sentence Strategy. The Strategies approach grammar by helping students to identify (and then write) subject-verb patterns in four sentence types: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex.

MODIFICATIONS

Since this strategy was designed to be used in high school learning centers, several modifications were necessary to make it appropriate for adults. These modifications included developing materials to teach entry level skills as well as adapting the existing strategy.

1. *Grammar Lessons*

   Knowledge of basic grammar is an entry level skill since the Sentence Strategy requires students to identify subjects and verbs. Many ABE students do not possess these grammar skills. Therefore, the instructors developed a series of grammar lessons which were taught before sentences were introduced. The grammar lessons followed the same general format as the Sentence Strategy. Exercises required students to identify, supply, and generate the part of speech being taught. Ample practice was provided to master each level of difficulty. The parts of speech taught were verbs, helping verbs, nouns and pronouns. Nouns and pronouns were combined in a follow-up lesson on subjects. Mastery of these basic grammar skills enable students to write complete sentences.

2. *Verbal Rehearsal*

   Originally, the strategy called for students to respond verbally to questions from the teacher. For adult classes, this step focused more on mutual discussion. The instructor did question the students, but the students were also encouraged to ask for any clarification they needed.

3. *Compound-complex Sentence Type*

   Compound-complex sentences were omitted since the instructors felt it was more important to move on to paragraph writing.

4. *Paragraph Writing*

   All exercises on paragraph writing were postponed until that skill was specifically taught. Initially, students were asked to write a paragraph upon completion of each sentence type. This task was frustrating since many ABE students did not know the procedure for paragraph writing. Therefore, those lessons were omitted from the Sentence Strategy. They were introduced later in a separate paragraph unit. This also served as a review of the sentence types since students were asked to include specific sentence types in their paragraphs.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. *Constant monitoring* by the teacher is required during class because each exercise must be graded before the next is assigned. One teacher per five students is the optimum ratio. An assistant may be needed for larger classes.

2. *Group teaching* is almost impossible. Even though the entire class may begin at the same level, students are usually working on different levels by the second class.

3. A *"Learning Center"* atmosphere is best because of the individualized instruction that is required.

4. *ESL students* seem to benefit from the strategy, although some of the sentences contain "slang" that may be confusing to them.

5. The *grammar review* will probably be necessary for most students before starting the strategy.

6. Class held *twice per week* seems to be better than class held once per week. Students are most successful when they write frequently. Also, less time is spent in reviewing, enabling students to progress more rapidly.

The purpose of the second phase of Project LIFTS was to provide other ABE instructors with an in-service program to describe the Sentence Strategy. Goals of the in-service were to explain the Sentence Strategy and data, and assist interested instructors in implementing the Sentence Strategy in their classes. An additional consideration was to provide information about the project which would reach as many instructors as possible. To meet these goals, Project LIFTS instructors produced a video tape which can be used in more than one presentation. The tape specifically discusses the steps of the Learning Strategies, contents of the Sentence Packet, scoring, modifications, special consideration from the Johnson County Community College Television Production Department which donated its resources and the expertise of its personnel to this project.

The video tape was an integral part of an in-service program held at Johnson County Community College. All ABE and ESL instructors were invited. In addition to viewing the tape, instructors received printed material that included pre-Strategy grammar lessons, steps of Learning Strategies, sample worksheets, scoring instructions, and charts of results. Copies of the entire sentence notebook were also available for review. A question and answer period followed the viewing of the tape. During this, the instructors clarified certain aspects regarding the use of the Sentence Strategy in the classroom.

Based on feedback from the in-service, it can be concluded that teachers plan to use the Sentence Strategy in a variety of settings. GED and ESL instructors indicated that they intended to include it in their classes. It is also being used in at least one Project Finish (adult basic education walk-in center established through Johnson County Community College). In addition, the tape and/or materials have been viewed by several groups and individuals not associated with Project LIFTS or the Johnson County Community College ABE program.

CONCLUSION

Project LIFTS has been a highly successful program. In addition to the documented improvement of the students, informal feedback from the students has been very positive. Students indicate that they are extremely satisfied with their progress and much more confident with their writing skills after having been exposed to the Sentence Strategy. Instructors at the ABE centers in Johnson County who are using the strategy routinely with all students (not just LD students) in need of grammar/writing review or preparation for the GED are equally positive about the program.

Persons interested in learning more about Project LIFTS or in viewing the video tape produced by Project LIFTS instructors are involved to contact Mr. Phil Wegman, ABE/GED Coordinator, Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, Kansas 66210-1299, (913) 888-8500

Further information on Adult Basic Education in Kansas is available from Wes Pelsue, Adult Education Specialist, Kansas State Department of Education, 120 E. 10th St., Topeka, Kansas 66612 or call 913-296-3192.